

March 6, 2012

Co-Chair Terry B. Gerratana
Select Committee on Children
Room 011, Capitol Building
Hartford, CT 06106

Subject: Support for Raised Senate Bill 296

Dear Co-Chair Gerratana,

I am here today to ask you and members of the Select Committee on Children to vote in favor of SB 296. SB 296 will allow Connecticut-born adult adoptees to receive a copy of their original birth certificates (OBC), upon request, removing the current requirement that they first obtain an order from a court allowing them to do so.

This law would reinstate this right of adult adoptees that was the law in Connecticut until 1974.

I am an adult adoptee who was born in Connecticut in 1959 and adopted here in 1960.

I am also a professional counselor licensed by the state of Connecticut. I have specialized in counseling adult adoptees, birth parents and adoptive parents for eighteen years.

I would like to speak of both my personal experience as an adoptee, as well as a counselor with many years of experience listening to the stories of those whose lives are deeply affected by the legislative issue before you.

Today I would like to speak to you about fear. Specifically, the kind of fear that has kept some people from supporting what seems to me to be obvious right of adopted persons to know their birth identity.

What I want to say first and foremost is, we don't need to be so afraid.

In my personal situation, I was adopted through the Village of Children and Families in Hartford. Many years ago when I was a teenager, I searched for and found my birth family. I learned from them that at no time did the Village "promise" to hide their identity. In fact, the Village gave my adoptive parents my full birth name at the time of my adoption. Later, my adoptive parents gave it to me.

Having my birth name enabled me to locate my birth family. Under the law in effect at the time, at my request a social worker from the Village was searching for my birth family on my behalf as an intermediary. After a full year of searching she hadn't found them. At the age of nineteen I finally "threw up my hands" and searched myself. I found them in six weeks. I learned that they had written the Village several years before and given their consent to being identified. When I discussed this with the social worker, she told me the letter had been misfiled.

I subsequently came to know this social worker very well and I believe she was telling me the truth about the letter being misfiled. The lesson learned, however, is that social workers are not private investigators, and intermediary laws often don't work as they are intended. Also, social workers aren't as capable as a highly motivated 19 year old.

You can probably tell from this story that I had what might be called a "successful" reunion with my birth family, in that all parties wanted to know each other. And in fact we maintain wonderful relationships to this day.

When I became a counselor, however, I learned that that this is not always the case. Although my professional experience has shown me that the vast majority of birth mothers consent to being identified (and research confirms this), there is a very small minority that do not.

So can I tell you what happens when this is the case? They just say "No". "No, I don't want to meet with you." Or "No, I can't do more than talk with you on the phone." Or they simply don't respond to the letter, the email, or the phone call: they live their "No" through non-action.

For all involved, it is painful. It is sad. It can be quite hard to deal with. *But it is not the end of the world for either the adult adoptee or the birth mother.* Birth mothers know they have had a child – this is a reality of their lives. Just as it is the reality of every adoptee's life that they know they have birth parents. Birth parents and adoptees are dealing with something they have known about for years, and have had many years to think about and prepare for.

All of us face challenges in our lives and our families. Life involves dealing with difficult things. Our work as adults is to learn to deal with these things. *And we do.* Even in what is referred to as these "second rejection" cases, I have never in my professional counseling experiences heard of a birth parent or adoptee not being able to handle it.

I am speaking about fears and feelings today in part because I believe that sharing my experience as a professional counselor offers some value to you as you consider this legislation. As I said before, I don't believe we need to be afraid of this legislation.

I also wish to share that I truly believe it is morally wrong to deprive an adoptee of their birth identity. It is a wrenching form of personal, ancestral loss that I think you can only really understand if it has happened to you. Before the age of 19, I had never laid eyes on a blood relative. Now, I can trace my birth ancestry back to the mid 1800s because, and only because, adoptees had access to their birth names when I was adopted in 1960.

I deeply hope Connecticut reinstates the right of adult adoptees to know their birth identity through passage of SB 296.

Thank-you very much for your time and attention today.

Sincerely,

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cc: Members of the Select Committee on Children